

When is a costume not just a costume?

Girl Scouts know a thing or two about tradition. Singing songs, crossing bridges, reciting the Promise and Law... these rituals and histories matter because they make us who we are. They are the root of our culture.

Learning about the cultures of the world around us, and celebrating the beauty and diversity of those cultures, is a major part of Girl Scouting. Each year, we come together on World Thinking Day to explore challenging global issues and connect with the communities around the world that make up WAGGGS: The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. This tradition is a powerful example of the critical role that cultural diversity plays in our community.

This year, we invite you to examine your own World Thinking Day traditions, reflecting on how they do, or do not, uplift and honor the cultures your girls will be exploring. Many troops, service units, associations, and councils incorporate global costumes into their World Thinking Day celebrations, offering up garments such as kimonos and saris for girls to try on.

This practice, while not inherently disrespectful, can easily fall into the realm of **cultural appropriation**: the *inappropriate and uninvited* usage of customs or artifacts by someone who does not belong to a particular culture. An example of cultural appropriation would be someone who is not a member of a Plains Native American Nation wearing an eagle feather headdress, a garment that, for members of those nations, is the highest honor one can earn. Wearing one as a costume would be like wearing a Purple Heart medal for Halloween.



So how do you participate in World Thinking Day traditions without disrespecting or misrepresenting the cultures you are exploring? It comes down to **knowledge** and **respect**.

- Do you **know** the history and significance of the cultural artifact you are using?
- Are you being **respectful** of the original culture?



Culture vs. Costume

Appropriation

Appreciation

Wearing a geisha costume from a Halloween store, accessorizing with items that just seem Japanese-ish to you (ie: chopsticks in hair).

Wearing a kimono, knowing about the different styles available as well as when, why, and how they are worn in different venues.

Wearing an “Indian” costume: a buckskin dress, moccasins, feathers, beads, braids, etc. Emulating representations of Native people you’ve seen in movies like Peter Pan.

Researching the clothing styles of a specific Native American tribe and purchasing non-sacred/religious garments and accessories, ideally from a Native craftsperson.

Painting tattoos on your face, modeled after images of Maori women with similar tattoos.

Researching ta moko tattoos, realizing they are sacred symbols of belonging for Maori people, and deciding to find a different way to express appreciation for their culture.



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